

Richard Cloudesley School

Safe Touch Policy

This plan should be read in conjunction with:

1. Safe transfer of pupils policy
2. Safeguarding children policy
3. Intimate care policy
4. SRE policy
5. Reducing the need for restraint and restrictive interventions policy

Approved by C&O Committee:

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Introduction

These guidelines outline the principles and procedures for physical touch between staff members and pupils at Richard Cloudesley School. All staff, visitors and volunteers at school are expected to follow these guidelines.

Staff at Richard Cloudesley took part in a workshop discussing the issue of touch in school and agreed the need to establish clear guidelines and a consistent approach across the school regarding appropriate touch.

Research has recognised that physical touch is incredibly important for a child's development. Touch is essential in order to provide sensitive, good quality care and to support natural interactions and is part of the development, emotional wellbeing, care and education of our pupils. Touch is the earliest sensory system to become functional and is the foundation for all other sensory systems. Positive touch is beneficial for both psychological and physiological development.

Psychologically, touch can be calming and relaxing and is vital for emotional wellbeing.

Physiologically, touch facilitates the growth of the body's cells and the development of the brain and nervous system.

However, in the current social climate there is a tendency to associate touch with intimacy and sexuality. Safeguarding children from inappropriate physical interactions is crucial but it is also essential to recognise that the use of positive, appropriate touch is incredibly important for a child's wellbeing, sensory regulation and emotional security.

Guidelines on the use of physical touch

The guidelines that follow describe the school's procedures on the use of appropriate physical touch.

Purposes of touch

Staff at Richard Cloudesley School routinely engage in physical touch with pupils for the following reasons:

- To aid and develop communication – touch cues, physical prompts, intensive interaction and to make social interactions;
- To offer physical support and guidance – help with mobility, moving and handling, guiding pupils into rooms;
- To offer reassurance and support – comforting distressed or upset pupils, communicating warmth, comfort and reassurance and to develop positive emotions;
- Physical intervention and managing challenging behaviours;
- Physical prompting and support – gestural and physical prompts during learning activities such as hand over hand or hand under hand support;
- To support pupils with personal care routines;
- Protection – from other students or from themselves (for example self-harming or absconding), including restraint and physical intervention;
- To carry out therapy programmes – physiotherapy, occupational therapy, yoga, rebound therapy and hydrotherapy, following programmes and advice;
- Responding to pupils' physical contact;
- Giving rewards such as high fives, fist pumps or a pat on the back.

General Principles and Guidelines

Staff need to have a clear idea of why they are using physical touch with pupils. Staff should not be touching pupils for the sake of it or because it is easier or saves time. Discuss the use of touch with colleagues if you are unsure.

Where appropriate have consent from the pupil who is involved in the use of touch. Always explain to the pupil what you are doing and why.

Be prepared to openly discuss and explain why you are using physical touch with pupils.

Staff should be sensitive to signals (non-verbal and verbal) that indicate that a child dislikes touch. For example, a child may pull away or make negative facial expressions.

Be aware that some pupils may provoke a physical intervention situation in order to gain physical contact.

Have a sensitive awareness that students with physical disabilities need support to touch and interact in ways that happen naturally with their peers.

Staff also need to consider the influences of race, gender, age, sexual identity and disability:

- Gender differences may make someone feel uncomfortable;
- A child's personal history may distort the understanding of a 'safe' adult;
- Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds may be used to different types of touch;
- Pupils with multisensory impairments may be startled by touch;
- Pupils with sensory integration difficulties may interpret touch differently to others;
- It is important for staff to familiarise themselves with the needs of different pupils and to ask advice if they are unsure.

Specific Guidelines and Principles

The use of touch to comfort pupils:

It would not be appropriate or beneficial to suggest that staff do not comfort pupils who are upset or distressed. Staff need to be aware of a pupil's individual needs and circumstances and should use their professional judgement when comforting pupils.

Pupils who have reached puberty:

Staff need to be vigilant and aware that pupils who have reached puberty may become sexually aroused by physical contact. Staff need to be mindful of this and alternative methods of contact identified.

If the pupil seems to be sexually aroused by the member of staff's actions during personal care routines, it is important that this is discussed with the head of department and an action plan drawn up if appropriate.

Students who touch staff inappropriately:

Occasionally students may engage in physical contact that staff find inappropriate. Staff should withdraw from these situations as soon as possible and these should be discussed with a more senior member of staff.

If possible, staff should not give negative feedback to the student as this may reinforce the behaviour. If this is a regular occurrence, the methods for managing this behaviour should be highlighted on a student's behaviour plan. If staff feel it is not appropriate to respond to physical contact from a child staff should avoid open rejection and should try to divert and redirect the child instead.

Hand Holding:

Staff should use their professional judgement when holding hands with students. Our students often need support with walking and balance or may need support to prevent them from absconding.

Staff need to be aware of the developmental age of the students they are supporting and be clear the physical contact used is appropriate for the individual student. Developmental levels can often be more relevant to our students than their chronological age.

In using touch during personal care routines staff should ensure that pupils are comfortable and familiar with the staff members delivering the intimate care policy.

Staff should be aware of the types of touch used. Pupils with ASD, multisensory impairment and/or sensory integration difficulties may become confused and distressed with certain types of touch. It is important to verbalise reassurances as well.

If you are in any doubt about any issues concerning appropriate touch, or you observe any practice that causes concern, you should discuss this with the headteacher or head of department.

All staff have a responsibility to ensure safe and appropriate practice at all times.